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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the objectives and organization of the Middle Management Center (MMC), a university-based interdisciplinary resource team dedicated to improving school management practices through involvement with school principals. The author, who is also director of the MMC, first discusses the place of principals in school administration and their need for improved management training and then describes how the MMC was specifically designed to meet this need. In the final section of the paper, the author presents a series of statements that summarize the major findings resulting from a case analysis of the MMC's first operational year. (JG)

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# MIDDLE MANAGEMENT CENTER

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## A MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT CENTER AND SOME EARLY LEARNINGS

by

Louis D. Barrilleaux

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FOREWORD

Publications developed by the Middle-Management Center (M-MC) are designed to assist others to make the managerial modifications which are essential if "better schooling" is to be more than a political phrase. The M-MC does not claim to have found ultimate "solutions." It is oriented toward joining with others in "searching for better ways."

The M-MC interfaces school principals with an interdisciplinary-interuniversity resource team and management resources from public and private sectors in activities at both the individual school and school cluster levels.

These activities involve cluster building and problem-solving, research-action, and continuous access to otherwise unavailable management resources leaving a legacy of improved school management with a posture of proactivity. Practicing administrators are essential coparticipants in the planning and execution of the systematic search for improved problem-solving structures, processes, and skills. It is assumed that both the quality of the work environments for teachers and the quality of the learning environments for students depend primarily upon the leadership/management skills of the school management team.

The hope of myself and my M-MC colleagues is that our commitment to the invention of leadership/management development arrangements may be extended and that the materials which emerge assist others as they pursue similar goals enroute to "better schooling."

Louis E. Barrilleaux
Director

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The development and activities of the Middle-Management Center have been supported through contracts with The Charles F. Kettering Foundation, New Orleans Public Schools, and The Rockefeller Foundation.

## A MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT CENTER AND SOME EARLY LEARNINGS

During the 1972-73 academic year a group of practitioners and instructors in the fields of education, behavioral sciences, and management conferred regularly about shared concerns regarding the need to establish effective problem-solving processes and mechanisms to aid in the development of school leadership. This concern reflected a shared set of philosophical and theoretical beliefs that the delivery of improved schooling could be increased through the improved problem-solving capabilities and management practices of the principalship. The group was formally organized into the Middle-Management Center (M-MC) and made a division of the Center for Education at Tulane University.

The case to be presented here relates to the early activities of the M-MC. Its purpose is to improve schooling by engaging principalships in the New Orleans Area in the search for "better ways" to increase their own managerial effectiveness.[1,2]

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[1] Only information necessary as an introduction is presented here; for further details various program documents are available directly from the Middle-Management Center, Center for Education, Tulane University, New Orleans, 70118,

[2] The writer acknowledges the many contributions of the other participants in the Middle-Management Center to the data base of this presentation.

## RATIONALE

Efforts to develop "innovative" instructional programs have become almost commonplace or essentially non-innovative, while few programs have been keyed to the systematic development of middle management educators who are themselves capable of improving or retarding learning. Reliable studies have consistently revealed the urgent need for quality leadership in the promotion of effective schooling.

Indeed, schooling innovations have not fulfilled their promise, and there are many reasons. One such reason may well be that too much attention has been paid to isolated aspects -- scheduling, curriculum, media, etc. -- and too little attention to the total school as an organization and a complex social system.[3] Another reason has been the failure to recognize that the quality of the work environments and learning environments depend primarily on the school principals and their supervisory-management teams who are ill prepared for their current roles.[4]

There is considerable evidence regarding the significant influence the management system of an enterprise has on the effectiveness of that enterprise as a whole. In particular, the rate of effective application of new knowledge in the management system of an

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[3] Newell, Terry. "Organizational Development in Schools," American Education, 9, December, 1973, 28-32.

[4] Sarason, Seymour B. The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971).

organization is characteristic of the rate of effective application of new knowledge within that system as a whole. The management of schooling can be looked upon as an important causal factor in its improvement or lack of improvement.

Schools are traditionally managed as individual and competitive units while assuming reactive rather than proactive stances toward problem situations. The prevailing conditions result in little interaction with other school managers and even less genuine community involvement. Indeed, Schmuck and Miles note that:

> Real improvement in learning is determined not so much by the adoption of specific educational practices as by the modification of organizational conservatism...and organizational pathology (school-community paranoia and mistrust, powerlessness, and alienation in teachers, and repressive management of student's lives).[5]

The evidence supports the need for a renewed focus on people and organizations -- the people whose organizational problem-solving capability is essential for any major improvement of learning.

As one role in the total organization, the modern school principalship is, itself, laden with ambiguity. Conflicts sharpen

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[5]Schmuck, Richard A. and Matthew B. Miles. Organizational Development in Schools (Palo Alto: National Press Books, 1971).

over the issues of "instructional leadership" and "middle management;" some practicing principals are addressing these concerns in the current literature:

> Proponents of the theory that the improvement of instruction should receive major attention from the principal, even in today's complex social institutions, presumably rely heavily on the archaic supposition that the principal historically and even today derives his power from serving as principal teacher of the school.[6]

Collective negotiations processes have effectively polarized management from teaching and have forced the principal (middle manager) into the management camp. Of equal significance is the condition that at one time the teaching staff represented the primary referent group; the citizenry, student body, and top management personnel now compete for the principal's time, energy, and creativity.

> Legal disjunction from the faculty...has precluded emphasis on instructional improvement...Students want more free time and more self-determination; while central office officials and citizens are in basic agreement that more productivity...is warranted.[7]

The development of managerial capabilities to conceptualize the school mission and to generate action priorities for the total school environment would assist in promoting the effective management of relationships with the principal's four primary referent groups -- students, teachers, top management, and citizens. Thus as school

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[6] Hoch, James A. "Feeling Guilty for Not Being an Instructional Leader? Don't." NASSP Bulletin, 57, November, 1973, 1-7.

[7] Ibid.

systems become more complex, principals function with increasing definition and clarity as middle managers.

While most do so reluctantly, some principals are documenting their agressive acceptance of the changed role and calling for an end to earlier charades:

> There is a complete lack of locally developed instructional management systems...The operational manager is the only person who can develop (the) system that will work in his school.
>
> If you believe it is essential for principals to assume the role and function of middle managers, the time to take action is at hand...we should accept the title and function of middle managers.
>
> ...agressively assume the role of middle managers and end our identity crisis in the process.[8]

Principals as middle managers occupy the organizational space between the top and lower echelons -- funnels through which the intentions of top management flow down and integrated information flows up. As middle managers with <u>several</u> referent groups, they are the integrators; they, indeed, operate the management systems that make the total organization work.

While approximately <u>one percent</u> of the employed school manpower is represented by top management personnel, about <u>five percent</u> is composed of middle managers. It is no exaggeration, then, to say that the effectiveness of school middle managers is of crucial importance.

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[8] McManama, John. "Middle Managers Wanted: Apply Here," <u>The National Elementary Principal</u>, 53, May/June, 1974, 59-62.

The remainder of the schooling manpower, approximately 94 percent, is influenced directly by the effectiveness of the middle manager. As the quality of life, development, and productivity of the middle manager is improved, the effect is multiplied throughout the system.

## THE MIDDLE-MANAGEMENT CENTER

The Middle-Management Center (M-MC) consists of a resource team, a client system of participating principals, and a program director. The intervention strategy linking purpose with resources is simultaneous research and action supported by continuing education.[9] In effect, M-MC is a "resource mobilizing" capability, a device through which resources from university, school, and general community sources are interfaced to bring about constructive change in school management practices.[10]

### Intervention Strategy

Through simultaneous research (to increase understanding) and action (to facilitate constructive change), M-MC seeks to develop the problem-solving capabilities and proactivities in participating principalships. Specifically, the strategy involves a resource team

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[9] Brown, L. Dave. " 'Research-Action:' Organizational Feedback, Understanding and Change," Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 8, November/December, 1972, 697-711.

[10] The development of the Middle-Management Center was supported through grants-in-aid from The Charles F. Kettering Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation.

and principals collecting data pertinent to school management and using these data for purposes of improvement. Such a strategy has been described by Clark as:

> ...A change oriented, knowledge gathering technique which is aimed at practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and one in which the intention of all involved is to gather data about and to make changes in the properties of the system itself.[11]

The conversion of "action-research" to "research-action" is deliberate and not perfunctory or whimsical. Contrary to the classical notion of action-research, conscious efforts are directed toward immediate problematic situations in which research and action are congruent -- principals own both aspects of the research-action tandem. The intent is to gather valid data and increase understanding as a prerequisite condition to improvements.

As a complement to the data-based action, M-MC mobilizes educational experiences (lectures, seminars, exercises, library resources, etc.) as responses to learning needs discovered by principals and the resource team in their activities.

Resource Team

The interventionist in the M-MC model is an interdisciplinary resource team. The members are all volunteers and participate on a marginal and part-time basis. In M-MC's first operational year the distribution included 12 university-types from various disciplines, three management practitioners on released time, and three management consultants.

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[11] Clark, Peter A. Action Research and Organizational Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

Client System of Principals

In the high school feeder system (composed of a high school and its two middle and nine feeder elementary schools) with which linkages were established, principals participated on a marginal time basis. In all cases this involved the expenditure of both personal and normal working time in the development of a "cluster" of schools.

Director

As a role, the director is accountable for M-MC as an organization. This includes "managing" the resource team, maintaining linkages between the resource team and the principals, and implementing the intervention strategy. The directorship is staffed on a one-half time basis.

Goals

During its first operational year, M-MC's goals were:

1. To develop the resource team,
2. To establish linkages with principalships in one high school feeder system (cluster),
3. To facilitate research-action experiences in this feeder system linkage, and
4. To interface management resources with the principals of the feeder system cluster.

## A SUMMARY OF LEARNINGS

The generalizations presented here deal with the development and initial implementation of the Middle-Management Center (M-MC) as a prototypic organization. The data source for the statement of learnings is the case analysis of M-MC's first operational year.[12] Statements are presented in general form to stimulate further reflection and dialogue; their validity, of course, extends only to the interpretation of the M-MC experience.

### Mobilizing A Capability for Management Resource Delivery

Competent personnel resources are available to contribute marginal time as resource team members to a management development center based on a university campus.

-- Compensated and non-compensated personnel resources are both available from (1) the field of public and private management practice, and (2) the multi-university and multi-disciplinary base.

-- Early and continuous team building is essential to establish clarity of goals, priority of actions, and a sense of ownership among resource team members.

-- Resource team members accept the simultaneous research and action mode in their own development as a team.

-- Leading attractions to membership on a resource team are the (1) interdisciplinary team structure, (2) opportunity to impact school management, (3) personal affiliations, and (4) research-action focus. Seventy-five percent or more say that fiscal remuneration is not a motivation.

-- Most resource team members recognize thier own learning needs.

-- Clarity of purpose, an action focus, and positive reenforcement from each other and school managers are identifiable factors in nurturing resource team members' commitments.

-- The management of marginal time contributions from competent professionals is one of the highest costs in the operation of a center.



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[12] Middle-Management Center. Developing A Prototype Educational Middle-Management Center -- Case Analysis (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1974).

Mobilizing Linkages with School Principals

Most school principals, in groups and individually, are sufficiently receptive to their personal and organizational development to voluntarily effect formal linkages with an external management resource delivery.

-- The cluster of school managers derived from a senior high school feeder system is a highly effective intervention linkage.

-- Group problem-solving procedures can be effected when common community, faculty, student, and administrative concerns are addressed in the research-action mode.

-- Active group participation approaches 100 percent voluntarily in a senior high feeder cluster of principalships.

-- The existence of an organized school-community group paralleling the senior high feeder system facilitates the progress of both the principalship cluster and the community organization.

-- A high sense of ownership is associated with principals' recognition of their feeder cluster as a source of increased influence and autonomy.

-- Indicators of psychological groupness and distributive leadership become evident within the first year of cluster formation.

-- Early dyadic relationships between individual school principals and a resource team member contribute to cluster formation. This relationship is the most valued aspect of a management center as expressed by school principals.

-- The dyadic relationship is the most resisted and least valued by resource team members.

-- Evidence of problem-solving proactivity as a cluster of principalships does not become clearly evident until approximately one year after its formation.

-- Top management personnel tend to demonstrate "measured" encouragement and support and a lack of threat by the organizing of principalships into clusters.

-- There is an observable and apparently essential sequence of success stages through which principalship clusters develop increased problem-solving proactivity:
   1. Phase of dyadic relationships,
   2. Phase of cluster-wide relationships, and
   3. Phase of school system-wide relationships.

-- The following contribute to the tension required to facilitate organization into principalship clusters:
   1. Cluster membership issues,
   2. Simultaneous organizing of referent groups -- community, teachers, top management,
   3. Expectations for managerial role changes, and
   4. "Organic" agenda planning and development.

Engaging School Principals in Research-Action Experiences

The research-action concept is neither widely understood nor consciously applied. This diagnostically based approach to problems gains acceptance only after long-term modeling, success, and reflective activity.

— Research-action experiences are more successfully introduced at macro or school cluster levels than at individual schools.

— The research-action mode assists in the derivation of problem conceptualizations by principals and resource team members working jointly.

-- The premature "uncovering" of problems by both principals and resource team members before the necessary action skills are possessed is temporarily dysfunctional.

-- Simultaneous learning needs exist for both research action and management skills by principals and resource team members alike.

-- The increased and conscious use of data is associated with greater proactivity of principals both individually and in clusters.

-- Research-action is initially viewed as traditional "research" and, thus, disruptive. Within one year most principals accept the research-action mode and give priority to data-based activities.

Interfacing Management Resources with School Principals

School principals and resource team members alike perceive each other's groups and other people as their most valued management resources.

— A management center can effectively assess management needs through the school feeder cluster as an intervention linkage.

— A management center can identify, create, and unify management resources.

-- Principals very actively accept random learning exercises and skill development seminars; behavioral changes are rarely evident in such cases.

— The need for management skill development as perceived by principals is associated with their conceptualization of a problem. In these cases, behavioral changes are usually evident.

— Learning and consultative relationships with resource team members from the private management sector (practitioners in business, industry, etc.) tend to be accepted by school principals.

— A lack of support and positive reenforcement is pervasive with the greatest deficiency at the lower levels of the schooling hierarchy.

— The receipt of support and positive reenforcement is among the highest values at all hierarchial levels of schooling. The provision of support and positive reenforcement for subordinates and colleagues is among the lowest values at all hierarchial levels.

## IMPLICATIONS

If it is important for principals to collaborate with others in the search for "better ways" for each to increase their effectiveness, the preliminary learnings offered in this paper are timely in respect to addressing very practical concerns of mobilizing resources for both self-renewal and immediate problematic situations. While supporting such efforts "in principle," the literature has tended to overlook the pragmatic managerial issues and challenges which impact collaborative arrangements.

The case of the Middle-Management Center (M-MC) describes the formative period of a collaborative school management development program and suggests action guidelines where the results should be the improvement of school working and learning environments. The major implication is for the professors of preparation and continuing education programs in which their direct involvement in the stresses of the principalship is suggested. While this paper may be especially relevant to those responsible for continuing education programs, it is offered to also stimulate reflection, dialogue, and proactivity among practicing school principals.